Sebastiano Erizzo

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Sebastiano Erizzo

DATE OF BIRTH 19 June 1525
PLACE OF BIRTH Venice
DATE OF DEATH 5 March 1585
PLACE OF DEATH Venice

BIOGRAPHY

Sebastiano Erizzo was a Venetian patrician and scholar. He has been called the only Venetian novelist of a 'certain level in the 16th century' (Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, p. 163). His father, Antonio di Sebastiano Erizzo, was a *Bailo* in Constantinople and a 'Savio' of *gli Ordini* (of which there were five, administering the maritime possessions) and 'Savio' of *Terraferma* (of which there were five, administering the mainland domains). Erizzo was married twice. He had no children but had a close relationship with his nephew, Piero Lando. Erizzo also became a 'Savio' of *gli Ordini* on 2 June 1551, and was elected 'Savio' of *Terraferma* on 1 June 1575, re-elected in 1581 and 1583. In 1582, he briefly became a member of the Council of Ten. For further information regarding Erizzo's political life, see Gino Benzoni's thorough entry on Erizzo in the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*.

Before 1570, Erizzo may have led a more scholarly than political life. He received a humanist education, first in Venice and later, in the first half of the 1540s, in Padua where he studied original texts of Aristotle and Plato. He was well versed in Latin and Greek and in the history and philosophy of the ancients. His interests in Greek philosophy and its systems of knowledge are reflected in the publication of *Trattato dell'istrumento et via inventrice degli antichi* (Venice, 1554) dedicated to Cardinal Marcello Cervini, the future Pope Marcello II. He translated Plato and published the first properly annotated Italian translation of Plato's *Timaeus* (Venice 1557 and 1558 [Edit16]), and in 1574 his translations of selected dialogues of Plato were published: *I dialoghi di Platone, intitolati l'Eutifrone, ouero della santità, l'Apologia di Socrate, il Critone o di quel che s'ha affare, il Fedone o dell'immortalità dell'anima. il Timeo ouero della natura. Tradotti... da m. Sebastiano Erizzo e del medesimo... illustrati con vn commento sopra il Fedone. Nuouamente mandati in luce.*

Erizzo was a numismatist, and he created a huge collection of coins and medals in his home and wrote a successful treatise, *Discorso sopra le medaglie antiche con particolare dichiarazione di molti riversi* (Venice, 1559) dedicated to the King of Poland, Sigismund II Augustus, which is still known among numismatists (according to Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. xxxii). He was also a bibliophile, and his library contained 1,150 printed books and manuscripts, in both Latin and the vernacular, including classics and minor authors.

Erizzo's contacts with Lodovico Dolce and the publisher Ruscelli may have been the reason for the expansion of his interests towards the field of literature. In 1561, he published *Esposizione nelle tre canzoni di messer F. Petrarca, chiamate le Tre Sorelle*, and he also composed Petrarchist verses himself. Perhaps as a further result of his studies in the great vernacular literature of the Italian *Trecento*, he wrote the 36 tales entitled *Le sei giornate* (1567), among which appear two stories set during the wars between the Ottomans and Venetians in the second half of the 15th century.

Erizzo also wrote a political discourse entitled *Discorso di Sebastiano Erizo gentil'huomo vinitiano de governi civili*, published alongside *Trattati ouero discorsi di m. Bartolomeo Cavalcanti sopra gli ottimi reggimenti delle republiche antiche et moderne* (1571). In this work, Erizzo explains the Aristotelian theory of three forms of government and the reasons for their corruption.

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Le sei giornate, 'The six days'

DATE 1567
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Italian

DESCRIPTION

Erizzo's *Sei giornate* was published under the prestigious protection of Lodovico Dolce, who did not limit himself to publishing classical authors, but also assumed the role of talent scout (di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere*, p. 59). The work is a collection of short stories and is often described as yet another imitator of Boccaccio's *Decameron* – justifiably, since Erizzo does imitate the *Decameron* both structurally and linguistically. However, according to Bragantini, the editor of the modern edition, it is 'a much more complex work which is full of literary and cultural "signals" ' (Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. ix).

The frame of *Le sei giornate* copies the *Decameron*: a company of ('noble') students from the University of Padua meet on six successive Wednesdays in 1542, during June and July, and tell six stories each. Erizzo followed the instructions of P. Bembo, who had suggested Boccaccio as a linguistic model for writing prose in the vernacular. However, the purpose of Erizzo's stories, or *avvenimenti* ('events') as he calls them, differs radically from that of the *Decameron* in that its moralistic attitude completely overwhelms the entertaining aspects so central in the work of Boccaccio. Erizzo's stories are similar to *exempla*, and he does assert in some of his other works that literature should be morally edifying. He calls his tales *avvenimenti essemplari* and *morali ragionamenti*. The concept of *virtù* is a crucial evaluative term in his texts: a virtuous death gives honour and meaning to a person's life. This moralising attitude can be seen as a result of the changed moral and intellectual climate of the Counter-Reformation. Furthermore, unlike the *Decameron*, in *Le sei giornate* the motif of *la beffa*, 'mockery', including jokes about sex, is not found; there is no use of comedy or humour; Erizzo hardly includes dialogues or direct speech at all, but rather uses monologues and a more essay-like style; there are no women among the narrators and there are only a few women among the characters; there are no religious figures either. In his introduction to the *Sei giornate*, Bragantini describes at length this 'strong reduction of Boccaccio's large thematic and stylistic ventaglio' (Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. xiv). Finally, Erizzo's representation of Muslims is radically different from Boccaccio's – a point that the

critics seem to have overlooked. In the *Decameron*, there is no prejudice against or accusation of Muslims, who are treated equally with the Christian characters. Boccaccio does not make a theme of conflicts or wars between Muslims and Christians and does not judge Islam from a religious perspective. Rather, he depicts a Mediterranean world in which commercial exchange between *mercatanti* (see V. Branca's still useful essay on this aspect of the *Decameron*, 'L'epopea dei mercatanti', in *Boccaccio medievale*, Florence, 1956, 172-206) and the Muslim world is natural. Among the characters in the *Decameron* who are praised for their generosity and virtues are the Muslim leader Sultan Saladin (novella I.3 and X.9). This treatment of Saladin, however, is in line with that of many other Christian writers from the 13th and 14th centuries.

The setting of Erizzo's *Sei giornate*, like that of the *Decameron*, is the Mediterranean, not only in the two 'Turkish' stories, but also in many others, and they take place against a background of intense maritime traffic, including both merchants and pirates sailing between the shores of Mare Nostrum. In Boccaccio, Muslims do not represent any threat or barbarian cruelty, but Erizzo writes in a society that has completely changed, with the Counter-Reformation becoming rigorous and demanding *l'ossequio quotidiano e totale alle norme, naturalmente imposte dall'esterno* ('daily and total obedience to the rules, naturally imposed externally'; Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. xv). While the distant settings of many of Boccaccio's novellas reflected the openness of Italian city states towards diverse social, ethical, political and geographical realities, and the possibility of exploring them and integrating them into a new understanding of the world, the setting of Erizzo's stories in a remote time and space – whether in an undefined period of Greek or Latin Antiquity, or in the Mediterranean (e.g. Crete, Calabria, Sicily, Naples, Constantinople, Hungary, Bohemia), or on an even more distant 'Atlantic' stage (e.g. Peru, Portugal) – suggests a symbolic distance from the Italian context and thus reflects a resistance to new intellectual, social and political realities.

On the other hand, the broad setting of Erizzo's *Sei giornate* is also a result of the greater geographical knowledge available to 16th-century writers, including knowledge that came through the European discovery of America and the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. And even when the action of a story takes place in Ottoman surroundings, the setting is neither *meraviglioso e mitico* ('wonderful and mythical') (Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, p. 163) nor a representation of an 'Orient de fantasie' (as suggested by G. Lebatteux, quoted by Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. xiii). Rather, as Preto also claims, 'the reader immediately gets the impression

of the particular relation between the Venetian civilisation and the Ottoman empire' (*Venezia e i Turchi*, p. 163).

The stories in *Le sei giornate* do not relate directly to the Italian contemporary situation, but they definitely touch upon issues in Erizzo's historical context: almost all the stories contain a plot describing an individual's transgression of the current law and his punishment by a tyrannical government, kings or other leaders who punish their subjects. Erizzo focuses on the tragic, the cruel and the moral; in tune with the reforming and perhaps tragic spirit of the time, he describes horror and pathos. All these *novelle tragiche* contain dramatic deaths, killings and captivities, often as a punishment for the violation of a law or in revenge. Erizzo's stories form a sort of moral educational treatise in which the acknowledgement of the individual's virtues and moral correctness is central. But it is important to stress that Erizzo does not represent religious devotion, but rather a civic ethic (Benzoni, 'Erizzo Sebastiano') which is not based on Christian religious values but – inspired by the classical Latin and Greek world – on political public morals concerning the common weal and representing an ideology of state. As Benzoni ('Erizzo Sebastiano') has claimed, Erizzo is an author writing in the Counter-Reformation rather than an author of the Counter-Reformation.

Two of Erizzo's 36 short stories directly treat Turkish motifs, and they are the only ones that take place in an almost contemporary period, that is at the end of the 15th century, and not in remote Antiquity or in the 13th century. The two 'Turkish' stories thus represent an exception to the rest of the collection. The historical and geographical contexts of these two stories are described realistically, though not in detail, and when the main characters move to places that belonged to the Ottoman Empire at that time (Gallipoli, Smyrna, the Aegean Islands) they depict a realistic space.

Like the other stories in *Le sei giornate*, these two open with an exposition of the facts, followed by the protagonist's monologue, and finally a conclusion. The first *avvenimento* with a Turkish motif is the twenty-ninth (of the fifth day). It takes place during the reign of Mehmed II (1451-81), at the time of his conquest of the city of Negroponte on the Island Euboea in 1470. Negroponte belonged to the Venetians, but after the Ottoman siege it became a part of the Ottoman Empire and an Ottoman naval base. During this first Ottoman-Venetian war between 1463 to 1479, Venice also lost several other possessions in Albania and Greece, but the well-fortified city of Negroponte, which had been a Venetian protectorate for centuries, was the most important.

Erizzo introduces the story by referring to his source, *le istorie Viniziane*. According to Preto he used Malipiero's *Annali Veneti* (*Venezia e i Turchi*, p. 163 n. 456), but according to di Francia and Bragantini he used Sabellico's history of Venice, *Decades rerum Venetarum*, published in 1487 in Latin, and in the Italian vernacular by Lodovico Dolce in 1544 under the title of *Le historie vinitiane di Marco Antonio Sabellico – opera forse più impegnativa e ambiziosa della storiografia veneziana di quei tempi* ('perhaps the most challenging and ambitious work of Venetian historiography of those times'; Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. xxvii). Bragantini demonstrates that Erizzo at times copies Sabellico's narration *verbatim* (*Le sei giornate*, p. 239 n. 1). According to Krappe, the source of *avvenimento* XXIX and XXX is a Venetian chronicle about Mocenigo's achievements, *De Petri Mocenici Imperatoris gestis libri tres*, written by Coriolano Cippico (1544), and Krappe claims that Erizzo's stories are in places literal translations from this Latin text ('Sources', p. 283). Erizzo's main source is the Latin writer Valerio Massimo, but he also imitates and quotes various other authors such as Boccaccio, Petrarch and Machiavelli, and it is not possible to find sources behind all the stories.

The twenty-ninth tale relates that, during the battles between Venice and the Ottomans, a young Sicilian approached the Venetian Captain Pietro Mocenigo (1406-76) when the latter was overwintering with his army in Naples. The Venetians had 'taken and destroyed Smyrna and after a bloody battle had set the enemy on the run' (ed. Bragantini, p. 242; all references to the text are to this edition). Erizzo may be referring to a raid on Smyrna by the Venetians, though this did not in actual fact result in the city being taken from the Ottomans. Mocenigo was one of the greatest Venetian admirals and he revived the city's navy after the defeat at Negroponte in 1470. He was a captain of the Venetian army from 1471 until 1474, when he was elected doge of Venice.

The framework of the story is thus historically correct, and Erizzo does not change either the names or the historical events (as he does in many other stories). Antonio, a young Sicilian soldier (who had perhaps been captured during the battle of Negroponte; p. 242), makes a proposal to Mocenigo: he has seen the Ottoman navy in Gallipoli and suggests setting fire to it, if he can get some men to assist him. Mocenigo agrees. Antonio then leaves for Gallipoli, pretending to be a fruit seller, but his plan does not succeed and he has to hide in a nearby forest with his men. However, he had also set fire to his own boat by mistake, and his fruit, which is floating in the sea, exposes him and he is captured by Turkish soldiers, who realise that they have been cheated. One of his men is

killed while Antonio and the others are taken prisoner and brought to the Sultan Mehmed II. When 'the Ottoman' asks him to explain himself, Antonio answers that he knows very well that the Ottoman's cruelty and 'barbarian nature and custom' will make Mehmed take revenge and punish him. He is very cocky and also says it was unlucky that the sultan's head did not burn together with the ships. He does not deny that the sultan's power is huge, but he does not at all regret his own 'high and magnanimous enterprise' (p. 244) and is prepared to die. Mehmed then cuts him and his fellow prisoners into pieces.

The story pays homage to Pietro Mocenigo, a man who was 'excellent and outstanding in the art of war' (pp. 241-42), and praises the proud young Sicilian for his courage and heroism. The narrator also presents the Turks' mercilessness, blaming Mehmed for not forgiving the Sicilian. Mehmed is full of wonder, it is told, because of the courage of the Italian, but he does not 'imitate the magnificent act of Porsena' (p. 244), a reference to the Etruscan King Lars Porsena, who did not punish the young Roman Gaius Mucius when he sneaked into the Etruscan camp to assassinate Porsena.

Erizzo's stories were published in 1567, four years before the battle of Lepanto in a period in which *il lungo sogno di neutralità di Venezia volgeva ormai al termine* ('the long dream of Venetian neutrality came to an end'; Bragantini, 'Introduzione', p. xxvii). They might thus be considered to be encouraging the struggle against the Turks.

The second *avvenimento* with a specifically Turkish theme, number XXX, which may also be inspired by Sabellico's *Venetian history* (Bragantini, *Le sei giornate*, p. 245 n. 1, and Erizzo: *non partendomi dalle viniziane istorie*, p. 247), tells of an Ottoman woman who sacrifices her own life in order to be close to her dead husband. The story tells of another heroic sacrifice, perhaps even more impressive as it is made by a woman.

The story is introduced by a long moral reflection upon the courage of the young Sicilian in the earlier novella, but it also shows an understanding of the sultan's desire for revenge. The narrator then reflects on the nature of personal sacrifice: one should not sacrifice oneself either without a cause or for money, as mercenaries do, but only as the Sicilian did, for the *ben commune*, the common weal, a concept that is repeated several times during the narration, and in this specific context includes the 'common enemy of the Christian name' (p. 247). The logic is clear. Common weal corresponds to the common *Christian* weal, and when this value is violated, revenge is considered 'just'. This way of reasoning seems similar to the crusading rhetoric of the humanists of the

15th century and earlier periods. The chronology of the two accounts (or perhaps two 'sisters') is also logical: the introductory reflections on revenge after the twenty-ninth story point forward to the story of the Ottoman woman, and in a way these reflections also prepare a legitimisation of the historical events recounted in the story: the Venetians' attack on Smyrna, during which they plunder and kill the inhabitants, is presented as just revenge for the killing by the Ottomans during the battle of Negroponte.

The story takes place after the Ottomans' conquest of Negroponte in 1470, in which the Turks had used *un'empia e grandissima crudeltà* ('impious and great cruelty'; p. 248), and after the Turkish raids on Friuli in north-eastern Italy in the 1470s, when the Ottoman soldiers spread fear and destruction (p. 248). According to Pedani, 'it was not in fact the bulk of the army, but of irregular troops, the Akinci, raiders of the border, which are used as scouts or as a diversion to distract the enemy's attention'. These raids on Venetian Friuli took place between 1469 and 1478, and again in 1499 (Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente*, p. 55).

Again, Pietro Mocenigo appears as a heroic figure, since he is leading the attack on Ottoman Smyrna (situated on the Aegean side of Anatolia) in alliance with the pope and the King of Naples. Erizzo gives a long description of the Venetians' surprise attack on Smyrna, a city that had never experienced war, as the narrator says (p. 248), and thus had not strengthened the city walls or prepared any other defence. The Venetians enter the city, steal 'robes, gold, silver and precious vessels of great price, like city thieves' (p. 249), and take prisoner women and children who hide in the mosques. The prisoners are taken to the harbour to be sent away and sold as slaves, but on their way to the Venetian ships one of the prisoners, a young woman, stops and weeps at her husband's grave. Her monologue bewails her miserable destiny and the loss of her 'beloved home': *Vedrò io le sue miserabili rovine, le distruzzioni de' nostri tempii, le vergogne delle vergini e delle matrone, la loro cattività, la uccisione de' fanciulli? E l'incendio universale della città, lo sparso sangue de' cittadini nostri e la cenere della patria* ('Will I see her miserable ruins, the destruction of our temples, the shame of virgins and matrons, their captivity, the killing of children? And the fire of the universal city, the shed blood of our citizens and the ashes of home'; p. 249). She does not want to leave the only consolation in her life, the grave of her dead husband, to whom she had promised eternal fidelity, and prefers to die there embracing the gravestone rather than following the enemy soldiers to be sold as a slave (p. 250). Even if her words could have 'softened any hard

heart' she is killed by an *importuno e poco pietoso soldato* ('importunate and pitiful little soldier'; p. 250). With her love for her husband and her homeland, the Ottoman women is an example of a most virtuous, self-sacrificing wife, like Boccaccio's Griselda or a *Lucretia rediviva*, and in spite of her Ottoman origin she functions as an example to the Christian readers.

In this account, the Venetians are, perhaps surprisingly, depicted as the hostile forces, while the Ottoman civilians are the innocent victims of the cruel attack. One may wonder why Erizzo chooses to recount this historical event instead of repeating the same 'cast of characters' from the earlier novella, in which the Italians were the heroes and the Ottomans the cruel tyrants. In fact, this story contains different interpretative possibilities that might also reflect different authorial intentions. Even if the Venetian soldier is cruel and merciless to the Ottoman woman, he represents a strong Venice that is going to defeat the Ottoman enemy. And the cruelty of the Venetian soldier could thus be considered a Machiavellian feature, a necessary element if one wants to win. The story thus infuses courage and self-confidence in Italian readers for future battles against the Ottomans. The Ottoman woman may thus represent wishful thinking about a defeated Ottoman empire.

The Venetian attack on Smyrna is described as just revenge for the raids committed by the Ottomans in Venetian territories. The narrator dwells for quite some time on these events at the beginning of the account, and the revenge motif is introduced in full.

Other stories may contribute even more to this 'memory-work' or indirect thematising of the contemporary Ottomans, even if they are set in more remote periods. One of them is the first day's sixth *avvenimento*, which tells a fictitious story (Bragantini, *Le sei giornate*, p. 70 n. 1) about two Christian kings who help each other against the Moors. Guiscardo, King of Cyprus, helps Rinieri, King of Sicily, to attack the coasts of Barbary in revenge for the damage the Moors have done in Sicily. The narrator presents the story as a case of 'true friendship' and a 'memorable example of love and faith between two friends' (p. 70). The King of Sicily asks his 'confederate' Guiscardo, for help against his enemies, 'being Moors and coming from Barbary', because he, Rinieri, is full of 'just anger' and the desire to take revenge for the 'insults' from the Moors, and he has decided to plunder some cities along the Barbary coast. Guiscardo goes to Sicily with ten armed galleys of his own and 15 others from Rinieri. On the Barbary Coast, the enemies wait for the Christian kings, prepared to defend themselves, and after a bloody battle the 'hostile forces of the

Moors' win and both Christian kings are captured. Guiscardo makes a long speech to Rinieri, telling him that it would have been better to wait for the enemy at home rather than attacking abroad. Bragantini demonstrates in his notes that Erizzo closely follows Machiavelli here, using the same historical examples. Guiscardo concludes his monologue with a passage that could also very well apply to the anxiety of Christian rulers in Erizzo's time: 'Who says that the enemies will not continue their victory after having destroyed the Christian army? That they will not steal the weapons from the Christian soldiers and use them to invade their countries now? In this way, while we cannot oppose the power of Fortuna, from having been kings of powerful people, we shall become humble and vile vassals of the Barbarians' (p. 74).

The Muslim captors allow the kings to be freed for a ransom. Rinieri goes to Sicily to get the money and returns to Africa to pay the ransom to buy his and Guiscardo's liberty. To celebrate their close friendship, Rinieri gives one of his sisters to be Guiscardo's wife.

The origin of the two allied Christian kings is not accidental: Cyprus was under Venetian rule from 1489 until 1571, when it was finally conquered by the Ottomans. Throughout the period of Venetian rule, Ottoman Turks raided and attacked the people of Cyprus at will. In 1539, when Erizzo was 14 years old, the Turkish fleet attacked and destroyed Limassol. The Venetians had fortified Famagusta, Nicosia and Kyrenia, but most other cities were easy prey. In the summer of 1570, three years after the publication of Erizzo's *Sei giornate*, the Turks struck again, but this time with a full-scale invasion rather than a raid. Famagusta resisted until 1571.

SIGNIFICANCE

The two stories demonstrate that, by the time Erizzo was writing, the Ottomans had taken on the conventional features of an enemy, being unremittingly cruel and unpredictable. Erizzo hardly needs to draw attention to this, but can assume his audience will share his attitude towards an enemy who they all knew had to be opposed and could not be allowed to appear sympathetic.

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Pia Schwarz Lausten

Francesco Balbi di Correggio

DATE OF BIRTH 16 March 1505
PLACE OF BIRTH Correggio, Emilia-Romagna
DATE OF DEATH 12 December 1589
PLACE OF DEATH Fornovo

BIOGRAPHY

Francesco Balbi was born in Correggio in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna in 1505, and died in 1589. He enlisted in the employ of the Order of St John during the Ottoman Siege of Malta of 1565, perhaps driven by poverty. He published the first edition of his diary in Alcala de Henares in 1567, while a second improved edition was published in Barcelona in 1568. Later, he wrote a poem celebrating the victory of the Holy League over the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto in 1571, *Canzone sulla vittoria dell'Armata della Santissima Lega contro la Turchesca* (Venice, undated). In 1586, he was in Parma and served under Duke Ottavio Farnese, and later that year he befriended Giovanni Maria Agazzi, a poet who hosted him at his house and whose company he shared for several years. In 1587, he attended the festivities held in Milan in honour of Duke Don Vincenzo de Gonzaga, who was passing through that city to take possession of the Duchy of Monferrato.

Balbi then left for his last trip outside Italy in the retinue of Muzio Sforza Colonna, and reached Madrid as page to the crown prince, the future Philip III. He remained with the prince even when Colonna had to stay for a time in Barcelona. By 1589, Balbi had returned to Italy and settled with Agazzi in his house in Fornovo, where he died.

Balbi di Correggio's works include encomiums of nobles he had served, and also the posthumously published poem *La Historia de los amores del valeroso moro Abindarraez y de la hermosa xarifa Aben Cerases, y la batalla que hubo con la gente de Rodrigo Narbaez, alcalde de Antequera y Alora, y con el mismo Rodrigo: Vueltos en versos por Francisco Balbi de Coregio* ('The history of the loves of the valiant Moor Abindarraez and the beautiful *xarifa* Aben Cerases, and the battle that took place with the supporters of Rodrigo Narbaez, alcalde of Antequera and Alora, and with the same Rodrigo: rendered in verse by Francisco Balbi of Correggio') (Milan: Pacifico Ponçio, 1593).